

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 ACDA-12 /106 W
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P R 190835Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1250
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LILONGWE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

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CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PINS, MOPS, PDEV, RH
SUBJECT: RHODESIA: CIVILIAN DEATHS

REF: LUSAKA 1768

1. ON MAY 14, ACCORDING TO A RHODESIAN SECURITY FORCE COMMUNIQUE ISSUED ON MAY 17, A ROUTINE PATROL IN THE GUTU TRIBAL TRUST LAND (TTL) CAME ACROSS A GROUP OF GUERRILLAS ADDRESSING A CROWD IN A "CURFEW AREA". THE SECURITY FORCES OPENED FIRE ON THE GUERRILLAS KILLING THE ONE WHO WAS SPEAKING. OTHER GROUPS OF GUERRILLAS THEN OPENED FIRE ON THE SECURITY FORCES "FROM VARIOUS POSITIONS". IN THE FIRE
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FIGHT "FIFTY CURFEW BREAKERS WERE KILLED AND ANOTHER 24 WOUNDED".

2. ON MAY 18 LOCAL PRESS ACCOUNTS CITED "EYE-WITNESSES" TO THE EVENT SAYING THAT AT LEAST 94 PERSONS HAD BEEN KILLED AND POSSIBLY MANY OTHERS. ACCORDING TO ONE ANONYMOUS WITNESS, ABOUT 200 PERSONS ATTENDED THE MEETING,

MANY OF WHOM WERE LOCAL PROSPEROUS FARMERS. ONLY ONE GUERRILLA, THE ONE SPEAKING, WAS VISIBLE, WHEN THE SECURITY FORCES REPORTEDLY OPENED UP WITH AUTOMATIC WEAPONS AND GRENADES. "THE WHOLE PLACE WAS ON FIRE", SAID THE WITNESS. HE REPORTS THAT MOST OF THE DEATHS WERE CHILDREN BETWEEN TWELVE AND FIFTEEN, INCLUDING THREE NEPHEWS OF ZANU (SITHOLE) VICE PRESIDENT LEONARD NYEMBA. ON MAY 18, RHODESIAN SECURITY HEADQUARTERS ISSUED A STATEMENT DENYING THIS ACCOUNT, ALTHOUGH THE DEATH TOLL WAS ADJUSTED TO 52. TI CALLED THE REPORT THAT THERE MAY HAVE BEEN MORE THAN FORTY ADDITIONAL DEATHS AS "QUITE RIDICULOUS". MEANWHILE, BOTH ZANU (SITHOLE) AND THE CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE HAVE CONDEMNED THE INCIDENT AND CALLED FOR AN INQUIRY. ZANU SAID THAT "SUCH ABJECT CRUELTY AND DISREGARD OF CIVILIAN LIVES AS SHOWN BY THE RHODESIAN SECURITY FORCES" WERE A DANGER TO THE PROSPECTS OF PEACE AND HAD "UNDERMINED THE TRUST NEEDED TO MAKE THE CEASEFIRE CALL EFFECTIVE".

3. COMMENT: WHILE NOT AN UNUSUAL INCIDENT IN THE PROSECUTION OF THE WAR SINCE 1972, THIS IS THE LARGEST OF ITS KIND, BEING COMPARABLY ONLY WITH THE 35 PERSONS KILLED IN SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES IN MAY 1977. RHODESIAN SECURITY COMMUNIQUE'S LIST ALMOST DAILY A NUMBER OF "CURFEW BREAKERS" WHO ARE KILLED, GENERALLY IN "CROSSFIRES". THIS FACT CONTRIBUTES MUCH TO THE CHARGES OF ATROCITIES LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COMMITTED AGAINST CIVILIANS. THAT THIS CAN HAPPEN SO FREQUENTLY INDICATES THAT THE SECURITY FORCES ARE UNDER ORDER TO "SHOOT FIRST, ASK QUESTIONS LATER." WHILE THIS MAY BE A DEBATABLE TACTIC IN A GUERRILLA WAR SITUATION, THE TIMING OF THIS MAJOR INCIDENT CAN ONLY HARM THE SHAKEN TRUST THAT THE TTL RESIDENTS AND OTHERS HAVE IN THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT. IT CERTAINLY WILL CAST DOUBT ON THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL'S SINCERITY IN PURSUING AN AMNESTY AND CEASEFIRE, A POINT THAT WAS SUPPORTED BY AN AMERICAN JOURNALIST'S OBSERVATIONS AFTER RETURNING ON MAY 17 FROM TWO WEEKS OF SPEAKING WITH BLACK AND WHITE RHODESIANS.
NELSON

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